

Minutes of the Human Rights Commission meeting

March 22, 2023

Present: Dianna Stallone, Susan MacDonald-Bolanos, Chelsea Sunday Kline, Booker Bush, Megan Paik

Absent: Angela D'Souza, Alton McCray

Guest: Gwen Nabad

Meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Minutes

Gwen Nabad is a resident of public housing and is interested in DEI community classes for her neighbors. She asked if the HRC offers family-oriented training or programming that connects the diverse community of public housing residents. She recalled a well-received international dinner sponsored by Abundance Farm and Grow Food Northampton for her housing complex several years ago. Chelsea suggested organizing around Juneteenth with a speaker and education and performance elements. Megan mentioned that HRC needs to ensure that any events it promoted or sponsored be accessible to the general public of Northampton. Anniversaries of the International Declaration of Human Rights, UN's Declaration of the Indigenous Rights of People, etc. were discussed as topics around which programming could be organized. Gwen admitted that housing residents had high barriers of knowledge, language, employment, and transiency that impede event planning and attendance. The commissioners speculated about whether the Human in Common: Diversity+Ethical Upstander training being undertaken by city staff has components that would be relevant and educational for all that use public spaces and housing. Booker reminded the commissioners to respond to Gwen's request for support with event planning for her housing development. Megan suggested that Gwen investigate the resources of Right to Be or The Wellbeing Blueprint and contact HRC's two planning subcommittee members who were not present. Booker thanked her for representing the perspectives of those who are less connected with the power structures in the city; commissioners thanked her for her work on current and upcoming committees.

Megan shared an email exchange between the Board of Health, Parks and Recreation, Robin MacEwan and the equity group of the Community Gardens, and Mayor's office. The new director of the Division of Community is also involved. Booker expressed gratitude for the interest in institutional changes indicated by the communication. A community gardens update will be added to a future agenda when Robin wishes to update the HRC on developments with the city administration.

Dianna asserted that a HRC without a budget or much authority is little more than virtue signaling. She is unsure how to make a more significant contribution in her current role as a commissioner, but she wishes the HRC to serve as a supportive advisor for the mayor. Susan also shared her experience as a member of the Select Committee, in which issues of inclusion and representation, roles, expectations, and others have been discussed. A source of tension is the public reporting of all the survey responses and other information shared in their meetings, often the city solicitor's interpretation of Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. Susan requested that the commission continue the discussion about the Select Committee's report in April.

New Business

Booker and Susan's terms will end in June; they intend to step down along with Megan. HRC will need new leadership to continue meeting. The next one is anticipated to be at 6:00 p.m. on April 26. Again, the Zoom session will open half an hour before and after the scheduled/recorded meeting time.

The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.